



Nutrition News

Help Your Immune System Fight Viruses

Much has been said over the past few months about how to prevent infection by coronavirus/COVID-19. Washing hands, using sanitizers, keeping physical distance, and wearing a mask all qualify as common-sense primary prevention advice, but a virus anywhere can be a virus everywhere. Physical barriers to the virus can help, up to a point. COVID-19 can be highly infectious, has the potential to survive for long periods of time on different surfaces, and mutates quickly. Those features all enhance the chances of getting infected, and once infected, suffering symptoms for longer than a typical viral infection. Dutchess County's response to the virus has been admirable, but continued vigilance will be needed for months to come. There's time for us to do more to make ourselves safer.

Many individuals who suffer complications when infected by COVID-19 have a compromised immune system due to two main reasons:

- Co-morbidities like obesity, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease
- Nutrient deficiencies

With good nutrition, you can prepare your immune system to function quickly and more effectively - and also reduce the risks from the co-morbidities mentioned above. Below are a few recommendations to optimize your immune system to help you fight more effectively any viral infection.

- Follow a diet rich in whole foods high in antioxidants (citrus fruits, yogurt, almonds,

spinach, garlic, onion, ginger, broccoli, red bell peppers - for starters)

- A diet low in simple sugars and refined carbohydrates like breads made with white flour, white rice, sugary drinks
- Limit processed meals like TV dinners
- Eat more vegetables, fruits and nuts
- Hydrate well, with plain water. As a rule, "energy" drinks aren't necessary for hydration and often contain far too much sugar. How much water is right for you? Take your weight in pounds and divide by 16, and you'll get the number of 8-ounce cups of water you should consume in a day. Example: If you weigh 144 pounds, that's 9 cups of water.

Lifestyle changes will improve your immune system's resilience as well:

- Get 7-8 hours of sleep, and stick to a sleep schedule, including on weekends
- Exercise at least every other day. An easy walk is usually plenty
- Relax. Try yoga, meditate, listen to music, or read a book.

Several vitamins and minerals are key to a strong immune system. Here's a breakdown. You'll see a lot of foods we've already mentioned, plus others to add variety to your diet:

- Vitamin C rich foods: Yellow or red bell peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, tomatoes, strawberries, grapefruit, cantaloupe, mango, and orange
- Vitamin D rich foods: milk, liver, eggs, salmon, tuna, sardines. Also, exposure to at least 20 minutes of daily sunlight will help your body produce Vitamin D
- Magnesium rich foods: halibut, spinach, beans, oranges, nuts, potato (leave the skin on), raisins, tofu, spinach

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Help Your Immune System Fight Viruses (continued)

- Zinc rich foods: beans, liver, yogurt, pecans, peanuts, spinach, and whole wheat bread
- Selenium rich foods: Brazil nuts, halibut, tuna, oysters, sunflower seeds, eggs, whole wheat bread, asparagus.

If you do not get adequate intake of the above-listed foods, you may resort to supplements in the following maximum quantities listed below. Check with your health care provider for follow-up information on nutrition, supplements and probiotics, to be sure they don't interact adversely with the medications you may be taking.

(mg = milligrams, mcg = micrograms, IU = international units)

- Vitamin C 500 mg
- Vitamin D 2,000-5,000 IU
- Zinc 30mg
- Magnesium 500 mg
- Selenium 200 mcg


If you're even more curious about how your body processes nutrients, ask your provider about nutritional panel testing, which aims to identify nutritional deficiencies that leads to personalized nutritional supplement recommendations. Testing can be done on healthy individuals to optimize health, and on patients with chronic conditions, to specify supplements aimed at ameliorating symptoms. Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance, in some cases, may partially or fully cover the cost of these tests.

But if you want to keep it simple, begin with Vitamin C. It's one of the most critical essential nutrients that we can use to strengthen the immune system. Scientists are continuing to learn more about how Vitamin C works. Vitamin C has multiple antiviral mechanisms and may prove to be a key line of defense against many viral diseases, including COVID-19. Vitamin C has shown benefits against

an array of viruses, including the common cold, influenza, and pneumonia. Meanwhile, it is well-established in laboratory tests that low Vitamin C levels increase susceptibility to viruses.

COVID 19 is a very serious contagious disease, the likes of which we haven't seen in many decades. How contagious it can be largely depends on the susceptibility of each host (that's us), as well as the precautions we take. Please make efforts to include fruits and vegetables rich in Vitamin C in your daily intake to halt the pandemic.

Best wishes,



Nimesh Bhargava, MS, RD, CDN
OFA Nutrition Services Coordinator

Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides qualifying seniors with one annual booklet of five checks worth \$4 each, to buy produce at participating farmers' markets throughout Dutchess County and New York.

Are you eligible for SFMNP? Eligibility is based on age and income; participants must be age 60 or older and have an income up to 185% of the federal poverty level.

What Next? Senior citizens interested in the SFMNP can contact the Dutchess County Office for the Aging, starting on July 1st, at

(845) 486-2555

(9:00 am - 5:00 pm Mon-Fri)
or

ofa@dutchessny.gov

Proof of age and ID will be required. Booklets must be picked up in person - but because of social distancing requirements, we cannot distribute coupons to walk-ins.

Please contact us before stopping in!